

FYSE 134.02: Religion and Nature in North America

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4 Glebe Street, Room 206 (upstairs in the back), 3-3911

Office Hours: M/W, 11:45 to 1:45pm, or by appointment (email works best)

Email: levasseurjt@cofc.edu (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends)

Lectures: EDCT 103 TR 12:00-1:15pm

Credits: 3 Semester Hours

Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.

In announcing the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives (part of the State Department) at the White House, Secretary of State John Kerry expressed the following: “In fact, if I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that’s how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today.”

Course Description and Instructional Format: This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to the academic study of religion, as well as to some of the diverse ways religions have mediated human conceptions of and interactions with the landscapes of North America. The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, open class discussion, and small group discussion. The course is designed so that the student, by the end of the semester, has gained a basic appreciation and understanding of some of the world’s major religions, and why such an understanding is important for both a liberal arts education and also to being a world citizen.

Course Goals and Objectives: Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the academic study of religion, including brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion; the historical development of the field; and the influence of liberal Protestantism on both the field’s formation, and popular U.S. conceptions of “religion.”
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about various religions in North America, from past to present, including their historical development and current manifestations, as well as learning about key figures, sacred texts, important terms, and foundational concepts, as these relate to the environment and more-than-human world of North America.
3. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and often times contentious ways in which religion has shaped human views of and interactions with the natural world in North America
4. To help students encounter religious traditions outside of those in which they were raised/are most familiar with, thus helping to build citizenship and religious literacy skills.
 - a. <http://www.cofc.edu/about/missionvisionvalues/index.php>
 - b. Daniel Deffenbaugh: “One of the fundamental objectives of any pedagogical strategy is to force students to step outside their received system of values and consider the validity of new ideas and novel approaches to understanding the world.”

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of religion in North America.
2. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions.
3. To systematically create a research paper that requires reflection on the writing and research process.
4. To trace and understand the transformation of American attitudes toward the natural world over time.
5. To investigate how the natural world in North America has been made sacred or profane, by whom, and with what impacts, on both the natural world and human communities
6. To explore how humans in North America gain calories/earn a living, and how this is influenced by religion and the natural world, and how this influences religion and the natural world
7. To explore who/what has moral standing within religious communities in North America, and how/why this may matter

Required Texts:

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for the day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand. Readings listed for the day are to be read by the beginning of class for that day, and ideally printed out to be brought to class. I suggest downloading all pdfs ASAP so you have them on your computer.

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *Assignments*: Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. Class participation—This includes your attendance, how well you engage the assigned readings, and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions and small group discussions. There will also be a mix of summaries of readings and/or question prompts about the readings that count towards this aspect of your grade. Students should check email regularly for reading quiz questions, which will be emailed at least 24 hours in advance of the class for when they are due, although some questions will be made available on OAKS. Participation may also include possible reflection journals based on a prompt provided by the professor, which will become the basis of a discussion. Students who are exceptionally engaged and who exhibit mastery of course materials and a robust inquisitiveness about the course content may earn more than 100% for this part of the overall grade. 16% of grade.
2. Volunteer Activity—Each student will be required to undertake 4 hours of volunteer work that is related to some environmental initiative. Students will write a summary of their activity, and relate it to class lectures/discussions and readings. Due final day of class (or earlier). 5% of grade.
3. Paper assignment—you will write a 7 page paper on a topic related to the course goals and objectives. A detailed metric will be provided, and options will be discussed in class. Due 3/27. 20% of your grade.
4. Reading Summaries—you will write summaries of 5 key readings throughout the semester. These will follow the below format:
 1. Summarize in 2 sentences, in your own words, the key argument.
 2. Summarize in 2 to 4 sentences, in your own words, why this argument matters for the author. Include 2 key passages to help justify your summary.
 3. Summarize the evidence presented by the author to make this argument.
 4. Place the reading/argument in dialogue with other readings and discussion from the semester.

Each summary worth 3% of grade, for 15% total.

***A hard copy of the summaries and paper are due at the beginning of class for when assigned; *late papers will be marked down 15 points for every successive 24 hours they are late from the start of class period.*

5. Quizzes—there will be three in-class quizzes throughout the semester. These will be a summary of content so far covered. These will each be worth 8% of your grade, for 24% total. Study guides will be provided.
6. Test—There will be a take-home final exam that will be a long essay, due during final exam week. 20% of grade. No late exams will be accepted.
7. Extra Credit—there will be options for extra credit as the course develops. Most likely these will include watching movies (especially those found in the library and listed on CofC's Films on Demand) and/or analyzing a current environmental debate/event where religion figures prominently. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion and contain connections to what we have covered in class. Each activity is worth .5 points, and a student may earn a total of 3 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is the last day of class. Any student who was present for the entirety of each class will automatically receive .5 points.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

2) *Attendance*: Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are repeatedly more than 5 minutes late to class, you will begin to be counted as absent for that day, as tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. After 2 unexcused absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After your 5th unexcused absence, you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. An excused absence means that I receive an email from CofC saying your excuse was "documented;" if I receive an email (or no notice at all) saying your absence was "undocumented," then it is unexcused. I will forward to you all emails I receive from Student Affairs in regards to an absence so you are aware if it is documented/undocumented.

Please note:

**It is up to you to contact the Office of Student Affairs in order to find out what counts as a documented excuse.

**It is up to you to receive class notes from your peers if you miss a class, as lecture notes will not be shared and/or repeated after the day they are presented. Students are more than welcome to come to the office to view .ppt lectures if they were present the day of the lecture and were not able to fully capture all of the material during a lecture, or if there are questions about content covered that day in class. .Ppt's will not be made available online, so make sure you are taking good notes during class. Lastly, if I am going too fast during a lecture, ask me to slow down.

**A valid, documented excuse must be received in order for a missed quiz to be made up. Reading summaries are not able to be made up or turned in late—you must be present to turn them in, or must clear *in advance* with me that you will *email your answers before class begins* if you are unable to be in class.

Please Note: students who miss 5 or more synthesis seminars where these are not excused will automatically fail the entirety of the course (both my class, and the seminar).

3) *Common Courtesy*: As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Be aware that if the professor observes that a student is often, and more so, continuously texting or using their computer for activities not directly related to the course, then the student's class participation component of the overall grade will automatically lose points. Please stay focused and on task if you have your computer open.

4) *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If evidence suggests that such actions have taken place, then I will send the work in question to the Office of Student Affairs/Dean of Students, where they will begin procedures to investigate possible infractions. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating—*this is especially true on the take-home reading quizzes, whereas if strong evidence appears that students collaborated, then all parties involved will automatically receive a "0" for that assignment.*

*** Inappropriate paraphrasing, especially of internet sources, is the most common type of plagiarism; please refer to the following tutorials for tips on how to avoid it:**

<http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/content.php?pid=47664&sid=351353>

*Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

5) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cde/index.htm>

6) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

*Counseling and Substance Abuse Services: Suite 300 RSS building; 843-953-5640

* **Center for Student Learning**: I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843)953-5635.

*really helpful links: <http://csl.cofc.edu/student-resources/index.php>

Course Schedule

It is the student's responsibility to approach me if a reading is not clear or if there are unanswered questions about the reading. The same is true for content covered in class. If you do not verbalize to me that you are having difficulty understanding course content (from class or readings), then I can only assume that everything is clear. If this is not the case, then you should approach me after class or during office hours. As much of what we read and discuss will be new material, there will most likely be difficulties; if this is your experience, then please see me. Remember, grades are not randomly assigned! When you do well (or not) on an assignment or test, reflect on the factors that made a difference—the time you committed, your awareness of the instructions, your understanding of the material, and the help you sought.

Unit 1: Key concepts, theories, and methods

- Tuesday, 1/13: get syllabus; defining key terms
- Thrs, 1/15: Ninian Smart on 7 elements of religion
- Tues, 1/20: Nature Religion (ERN)
- Thrs 1/22: Nature Religion in the United States (ERN)

Unit 2: Deep History of North America (and of humans, broadly)

- Tues, 1/27: Kirkpatrick Sale; **summary #1 due**
- Thrs, 1/29: Who Was Here Before European Contact
- Tues, 2/3: Circling Earth (Joel Martin); Romanticism and Indigenous Peoples (ERN)
- Thrs, 2/5: Meet in library to begin research
- Tues 2/10: **quiz #1**

Unit 3: Early views of Foreigners

- Thrs, 2/12: European contact—1400s through 1700s; Nash—Intro through chpt 1
- Tues, 2/17: African/African American views: Strange Renderings of Nature and A Land Cursed by Injustice (Kim Smith); **summary 2 due**
- Thrs, 2/19: 1700s/1800s—Rousseau; Emerson; Book of Nature (ERN); Romanticism (ERN)
- Tues, 2/24: Nash on Thoreau; George Perkins Marsh
- Thrs 2/26: **quiz #2**

Unit 4: Emergence of modern American views of Nature

- SPRING BREAK—be safe and have fun! Go outside and get dirty.
- Tues 3/10: Muir vs. Pinchot; making of American parks; Wilderness (ERN)
- Thrs 3/12: selections from *A Sand County Almanac*; **summary 3 due**
- Tues 3/17: movie
- Thrs, 3/19: movie
- Tues, 3/24: Discussion
- Thrs, 3/26: *class visit, Clayton Thomas-Mueller*
- **Paper Due—3pm, Friday, 3/27**, in my mailbox at 4 Glebe, RELS Office

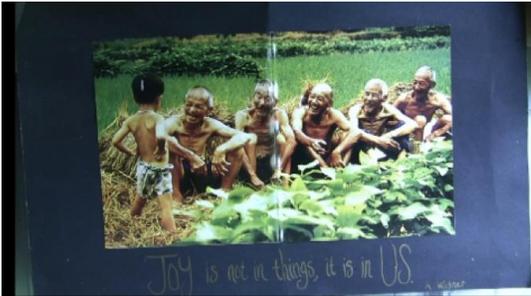
Unit 5: 1900s onward—contemporary views of religion and nature in North America

- Tues 3/31: Religious Environmentalism (ERN)
- Thrs 4/2 : Thomas Berry video and reading
- Tues, 4/7: Mountain Top Removal
- Thrs, 4/9: **quiz #3**
- Tues, 4/14: Megan...Wendell Berry **summary 4 due**
- Thrs, 4/16: Dark Green Religion
- Tues, 4/21: *Earth Days* documentary
- Thrs, 4/23: finish documentary; wrap up

Final Exam—comprehensive take home; meet in class for a pot-luck (attendance mandatory)

“The Laughing Oath”

I do solemnly swear from this day forward
To grease my giggling gears each day
And to wear a grin on my face for no reason at all
I promise to tap my funny bone often,
With children, family, friends, colleagues and clients,
And to laugh at least fifteen times per day.
I believe that frequent belly laughter
Cures terminal tightness, cerebral stuffiness,
And hardening of the attitudes,
And that HA HA often leads to AHA!
Therefore, I vow, from this day forth,
To brighten the day of everyone I meet,
And to laugh long and prosper.



“Joy is not in things, it is in Us.”

